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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED: DISTRACTED DRIVING IN COLOMBIA

REF: STATE 6703

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Econoff delivered reftel demarche to Jorge Carrillo Tobos, the Director of Transportation and Transit at the Ministry of Transportation on January 25. Carrillo responded that Colombia passed a 2002 law making it illegal to drive and use a mobile communication device unless the device is hands-free. The Ministry of Transportation, via its Accident Prevention Fund, conducted a road safety awareness campaign on the dangers of cell phone use while driving after the passage of the law. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Econoff delivered reftel demarche on January 25 to Jorge Carrillo Tobos, the Director of Transportation and Transit at the Ministry of Transportation. Carrillo responded that in 2002 Colombia passed Law 769 under the National Transport Code which makes the "use of mobile communications systems or a telephone in a vehicle while driving, except those that are used with accessories or additional equipment that allow hands-free use" punishable by a fine of 15 days of minimum wage.

¶3. (U) The Ministry, through its Accident Prevention Fund, has conducted a road safety campaign targeting cell phone

use while driving. In 2009, there were 57,253 infractions under the law and in 2010, there have been 1,657 infractions. Carrillo said that distracted driving, including texting while driving, is of growing concern in Colombia, but that no exact figures exist to document distracted driving as a cause of accidents. Carrillo added that his office was also concerned about other kinds of distractions to drivers, such as moving vehicles that display large advertisements on Colombian highways.

¶4. (SBU) Comment. Post notes that many driving dangers exist in Colombia. In many cases, drivers ignore even basic traffic laws. The Ministry of Transportation hired experts in 2008 to conduct an analysis of road behavior in the cities of Bogota, Medellin, Cali, Barranquilla and other smaller cities. The report found that 25% of those surveyed admitted to ignoring traffic lights and 40% believe that drinking and driving does not cause accidents. While the GOC acknowledges the dangers of texting while driving, and Colombia in fact outlaws cell phone use while driving, enforcement and awareness of traffic laws remains a key challenge. End Comment.

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